

Minutes of DAAC Meeting

Attendance

DAAC members present were: Seren Derin, Chair; Irene Barrelet, Clerk; Joan Rising; Dana Goddard and Jim MacRostie.

Others present were Gerry Weiss, Select Board Representative; Nathaniel Malloy, DAAC staff liaison; and members of the public Jane Gamache.

Absent: Joe Tringali, Vice-chair; Reginald Andrade

Call to Order

Chair Seren Derin called the meeting to order at 3:09 p.m.

Announcements

No announcements.

Minutes

Minutes from the February, 2009 meeting were reviewed and discussed. No corrections were found. Ms. Derin made a motion to accept the minutes; Ms. Rising seconded the motion, and the vote was unanimous to accept the February minutes as submitted.

Membership—New Members and Role of Individuals

Mr. Malloy explained the process of becoming a member of the Disability Access Advisory Committee (DAAC): citizens can complete and submit a citizen activity form (CAF) either online or in the Town Manager's Office, which will be reviewed when there is an open seat, and if selected, must be appointed by Town Manager and sworn in by the Town Clerk. Mr. Malloy also explained that per the membership rules and committee charge, a member who misses three or more consecutive meetings without providing a sufficient reason can have their membership revoked by the Town Manager, the appointing authority of the DAAC.

Ms. Rising asked what the maximum number of people that could be on a town committee.

Ms. Derin explained that she understands that a nine-member committee is the largest possible, but it is difficult to obtain a quorum at meetings and to change the number of members would require approval by the Town Manager and Select Board.

Ms. Barrelet recommended that the committee develop a draft resignation letter to be mailed with a self-addressed return envelope to members who miss more than three consecutive meetings and cannot be contacted. The letter would require only their signature, and when mailed to the Town Manager's office, would be recorded with the Town Clerk as an official resignation.

Ms. Rising asked if having a membership revoked by Town Manager would put that citizen in bad standing when reapplying for another board or committee.

Mr. Weiss responded that such a letter would remain on file and could be reviewed at a later date.

Mr. Malloy also explained that as a member of the DAAC, individuals are essentially “unpaid employees” of Amherst, which means that when contacting a property or business owner or when speaking to the public, that the individual is doing so as a private citizen unless authorized to do so on behalf of the DAAC at a public meeting. The DAAC represents the entire community of Amherst, and individuals should not use the committee to voice personal opinions.

Ms. Barrelet suggested that committee members who receive inquiries from citizens bring the issue to a meeting so that it can be discussed by the entire DAAC.

Mr. Weiss reinforced that when serving on a board or committee, the citizen must act responsibly and know that there are clear roles as a private citizen and a public servant. He emphasized that the DAAC should answer inquiries by assigning a person or persons to contact the public.

Ms. Rising noted that the DAAC cannot always file a complaint to a business or property owner; individuals need to file grievances as well because people need to be made aware when they are restricting access or not up to code.

Public Awareness Campaign—Chamber of Commerce

Mr. Malloy recalled his discussion with Mr. Maroulis, Executive Director of the Chamber of Commerce, in which Mr. Maroulis explained that the issue of regulating private parking lots in town, in particular HP spaces, is outside the purview of the Chamber. However, the Chamber would cooperate with the DAAC on a public awareness campaign to educate the public about the importance of accessible parking.

Mr. Weiss explained that he planned to attend the Parking Task Force meeting in March, and asked if Mr. Malloy could attend Promoting Downtown Amherst (PDA) as his schedule had changed. Mr. Malloy agreed to attend PDA.

Ms. Derin inquired about free parking in Amherst, responding to a local news article. She asked who would enforce the free parking, especially if it is for 15 minutes.

Ms. Barrelet explained that enforcing HP parking on private lots is an issue in downtown Amherst. She cited the CVS parking lot in which the spaces are almost always occupied by a vehicle without a placard.

Ms. Derin noted that delivery persons often park in HP spaces when they are picking up food or making a delivery. She thought this issue could be discussed as part of the public awareness campaign. She noted that awareness is very important, remembering that after the DAAC contacted a food take-out business whose drivers frequently used HP spaces, they stopped parking there—no tickets were issued.

Cinema seating—Amherst Cinema and Cinemark Theater

Mr. Malloy described his phone conversations with the Amherst Cinema and Cinemark Theater regarding policies and rules for accessible and companion seating. Amherst Cinema’s policy is that when asked, a manager will accompany a moviegoer to the theater and ask those sitting in companion seating to move if necessary. The theater said they would place a sign near the ticket vendor/food sales area to make the public aware of this policy. Cinemark Theater has the same policy as Amherst

Cinema, and includes clear markings on the back of the companion seats and the floor to designate them as accessible and companion seating. Amherst Cinema does not mark the floor or seats.

Member of the public, Ms. Gamache, confirmed that Cinemark Theater uses the HP symbol to make the public aware which seats and sitting area are accessible and companion seating.

Ms. Derin asked if a sign could be placed inside individual theaters, advertising the policy regarding companion seating. She noted that many people may have a ‘hidden’ disability that is not visible, making it difficult to determine who can use the companion seating without asking them personally.

Ms. Rising suggested a notice/advertisement could be shown on the movie screen to inform moviegoers about the rules and policies regarding accessible and companion seating. This advertisement could be incorporated into the standard advertisements previewed before a film.

Mr. MacRostie stated the HP symbol be included in any advertisement on the screen because it is identifiable and respected. He also said that even with an advertisement on the screen, Amherst Cinema should use the HP symbols on the backs of companion seats like Cinemark Theater.

Other—Application for Variance for 683 & 687 Main Street

Mr. Malloy described that the Main Street Housing project by the Amherst Housing Authority has reapplied for a variance from the Architectural Access Board to allow the construction of a front entrance ramp to one dwelling and not a second dwelling in a Group 1 unit. The side entrances to each unit are accessible and enter into the bedroom. The project is seeking a variance due to the extraneous cost of retrofitting ramps to the existing front porches.

Ms. Derin suggested the porches for the two units be connected so that one ramp can service both units.

Ms. Rising asked if it was more important to halt the project until both units could have 2 accessible entrances, or make the units available now for those who need affordable housing. It could be stipulated as a condition of the variance that when there is sufficient funds, the second unit would be required to add the ramp.

Ms. Derin noted that because there are fully accessible units in the development, it is acceptable for these visitable units to have only one accessible entrance, as long as it is not lived in by someone who would need two accessible entrances for safety.

Ms. Derin made a motion to recommend approval of the variance with two conditions

1. When sufficient funds are available, the Amherst Housing Authority is required to construct a ramp to the second unit, and
2. The second unit, without the front entrance ramp, must remain a visitable dwelling. If someone were to move in and need two accessible entrances for safety, the ramp must be constructed.

Mr. Goddard seconded the motion and the recommendation passed by a vote of 5-0.

Emergency Contact Information

Ms. Barrelet contacted Mr. Botch with the Massachusetts Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing to learn the policies for public buildings & services regarding TTY and videophone services. It is her understanding that videophone can go directly to 911 in case of an emergency. Ms. Barrelet intends to attend a workshop in Springfield about how the deaf receive and make 911 calls.

Amherst Train Station

Ms. Derin asked if anyone with a personal grievance has contacted the Town or DAAC about the Amherst Train Station. She said it is an eyesore, especially during the Town's 250th Anniversary when people will be arriving by train.

Mr. Weiss noted that the Town would like to see the property improved, but that it is privately owned.

Seating at the High School Auditorium

Mr. MacRostie reported that at a recent event he attended at the high school, there was limited accessible seating. He said that boxes and supplies occupied seats along the back, and that it appeared there were too few accessible and companion seats distributed throughout the auditorium. He said that some seats will need to be sacrificed to make more accessible seating, but the number would be minimal with little effect to total number of seats.

Mr. Weiss asked how many accessible and companion seats the auditorium is required to have.

Mr. MacRostie responded that without knowing the seating capacity, a definite number cannot be calculated. He did note that when Bowker Auditorium at UMass was renovated 15 years ago, 12-18 accessible seats were required.

Mr. Rising mentioned that when she attends an event at the High School, she will call ahead and reserve seats in the back row, explaining that a guest in a wheelchair will need to sit behind them in the aisle. She said the high school reserves the seats.

Ms. Barrelet asked if there were grouped seats for the deaf, so they could see an interpreter or close-captioning. She said that Massachusetts has regulations for such seating in places of assembly.

Next Meeting

Meetings for the next few months were discussed and it was agreed that the DAAC would continue to meet at Stavros. The meeting times are as follows:

April 7, 2009 @ 3:00 pm

May 5, 2009 @ 3:00 pm.

Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 4:35 PM

Respectfully submitted,
Nathaniel Malloy, staff liaison